

University of California, Irvine

UCI Public Information Office
Irvine, California 92717
(714) 833-6922

202-D-82

July 1, 1982

The United States and the Soviet Union are separated by something more fundamental than their respective ideologies, according to a new book by a UC Irvine research psychologist.

In "Algebra of Conscience: A Comparative Analysis of Western and Soviet Ethical Systems" Dr. Vladimir Lefebvre posits the existence of two types of ethical systems, one predominating in the United States, the other holding sway in the Soviet Union. These systems influence the thinking and behavior of the general populace and leaders alike, Lefebvre says. They are so basic and so different that they make understanding difficult between the two countries since the nations are not playing by the same ethical rules.

Lefebvre says that those who operate under the Western (or "first") ethical system are opposed to compromise between good and evil, even as a means of achieving good ends. These same people--which is to say most of the people in the West--hold as a cultural ideal, however, the notion of compromise in situations of conflict with others.

-more-

LEFEBVRE BOOK
Page 2

In the Soviet (or "second") system, the opposite is true, Lefebvre says. The Soviets have a positive attitude toward compromise between good and evil as a means of achieving good ends but are uncompromising in confrontations with others. They hold, in other words, that the end justifies the means but that one must not compromise with opponents.

The disparity between the systems is exemplified in differing national attitudes toward a well-known episode in American history.

"There is hardly a single person in the Soviet Union who could understand what the Watergate scandal was about," says Lefebvre, who emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States in 1974. "There were many there who knew the details of the episode, but they can give only a strategical analysis, not a moral one; they cannot understand the ethical dilemma of the situation. They think Nixon behaved in an ethically correct manner. He had important goals on behalf of his country; he tried to preserve his own prestige and that of the United States and the presidency. Had he killed a few persons that would not have been important."

Those who operate under the second system may value the compromise between good and evil in achieving goals, but they despise such compromise in dealings with adversaries.

"A few years ago, President Carter kissed (Soviet President) Brezhnev when the two met in Vienna," Lefebvre says. "From the American point of view, this was a demonstration of standard Christian (compromising) behavior. But from the Soviet point of view this was a demonstration of weakness. The normative ideal in the Soviet Union is of strength in an uncompromising person."

-more-

LEFEBVRE BOOK
Page 3

Lefebvre marshals evidence from several sources to support his contention that the West operates under one ethical system while the Soviet Union operates under another. He looked at the Ten Commandments as a basic codification of Western ethics; its counterpart in the Soviet Union, he says, is the "Moral Code of a Builder of Communism," which is part of the program of the Communist Party. He also evaluated heroes in literature and folklore.

Further, he conducted his own comparative survey. Using a questionnaire, he posed identical moral choices to 62 Americans and 84 recent Soviet immigrants to America. The results uniformly supported his thesis, he says.

One of the survey's statements, for example, was, "One may send a cheat sheet during a competitive exam to a close friend." Only 8 percent of the Americans agreed with the statement, compared to 62 percent of the Soviet immigrants. When the statement was posed in the negative ("One must not send a cheat sheet...") 90 percent of the Americans agreed, compared to 37.5 percent of the Soviet immigrants.

Ethnocentrism is such that Westerners may be quick to judge the Soviet stance "amoral" but this is not the case, Lefebvre says. The Soviet position is based on "moral cognition." It represents a different standard of ethics, not a lack of ethics.

The U.S.-Soviet ethical disparity may be the most significant "real world" information to emerge from "The Algebra of Consicence" but the book is not simply an informal comparison of the two countries. It delivers what its title implies: A mathematical formulation of ethical relationships.

-more-

LEFEBVRE BOOK
Page 4

A "structural relationship" exists between good and evil no matter how these terms are defined in a given culture, Lefebvre says. Thus, a mathematical formula can be drawn up that formalizes this relationship. Lefebvre's formula (which uses Boolean algebra) can be used to predict a hierarchy of archetypical individuals within the two ethical systems; its categories are "saint," "hero," "philistine" and "dissembler." A saint, at the top, behaves sacrificially but doesn't evaluate his behavior as such. A dissembler, at the other end, falsely evaluates his behavior as sacrificial. Heroes and philistines fall in between.

Identical behaviors would rank an individual at different stations in the two systems --one culture's hero is another culture's philistine. Given either system, however, ranking can be predicted in accordance with behavior. The formula also provides a mathematical expression for the relationship between image of "self" and image of "opponent" in ethical situations.

Perhaps the most striking claim Lefebvre makes for his formula is that it is not merely a construct for comparing ethical behaviors. The formula, he says, describes ethical interrelationships that are as fixed as relationships in the world of physics. The formula is, therefore, as immutable as the rule of physics that describes the relationship between pressure, density and heat, for example.

Though "Algebra of Conscience" does not make value judgments about the two ethical systems it deals with, Lefebvre personally believes that the Western ethical system is superior to the Soviet system. Such tragedies as the mass murder and terror carried out under Stalin are, in a sense, the logical outcome of the second system, he says. Stalin's actions were to some extent "justified" by the system's first maxim: It is acceptable to compromise with evil in order to achieve goals. Stalin, in turn, felt compelled to carry out such campaigns because of the system's second rule: Compromise with enemies is dishonorable. Any small conflict is thus likely to become a large conflict in the second system.

-more-

LEFEBVRE BOOK

Page 5

Moreover, the second system contains an inherent contradiction. Societies which adhere to the system value the "proud man" who will fight all enemies, yet they cannot tolerate him. Thus, such people in the Soviet Union must be--indeed, have been--eliminated. In the Soviet Union such persons exist only as an abstract, unachievable ideal; they are largely the figment of memory, as in the case of the Soviet heroes of World War II. Soviet society, Lefebvre says, is now in a philistine phase in which persons have low self-respect and obey any strong opponent.

The disparity between the Soviet and Western ethical systems is a severely limiting factor in U.S.-Soviet relations, Lefebvre says. He is "very pessimistic" about the possibility of any real dialogue between the two nations, even assuming that both could be made aware of the different "rules" under which each operates.

"Ethical" actions of the two are to a certain degree mutually exclusive. Compromise by one is viewed as evil by the other; conciliatory gestures by one are considered contemptible by the other. The long-term prospect, he says, is not encouraging.

Vladimir Lefebvre was a research scientist at the Central Mathematical Economics Institute in Moscow before emigrating to the United States in 1974 along with his wife, Victorina. Lefebvre left the Soviet Union, he says, because he could not tolerate conditions there, particularly in his field, psychology. "Psychiatric abuses" in the Soviet Union--in which political prisoners have falsely been declared "insane" by Soviet authorities--convinced the Lefebvres they had to leave.

LEFEBVRE BOOK

Page 6

As luck would have it, they chose to do so at a time when Soviet policies toward emigration were relatively unrestrictive. Lefebvre became a lecturer in UCI's School of Social Sciences in 1977 and received an appointment as a research psychologist in the school in 1978. Victorina Lefebvre is an assistant research psychologist in the school; she translated "The Algebra of Conscience" from the Russian and aided in research on it. "The Algebra of Conscience" was published by D. Reidel, Holland.

#

CONTACT: David Krogh, Public Information Representative, (714) 833-6922.

1. A criminal can be punished more severely than the law requires, if this may serve as a deterrent for others.

_____ Yes

_____ No

2. A doctor should conceal from a patient that he has cancer, in order to diminish the patient's suffering.

_____ Yes

_____ No

3. A good person in a situation of conflict with an insolent person:

_____ would not seek compromise with him

_____ would seek compromise with him

4. Two terrorists are hijacking a small plane. There is a possibility of killing them without injury to the passengers. Another possibility is to start negotiations first and try to persuade them to surrender. The head of the rescue group made the decision not to negotiate with the criminals.

Did he act correctly?

_____ Yes

_____ No

SEX: _____ M _____ F

AGE: _____

number of statement	STATEMENTS	percent in agreement	two-tailed confident interval for p=95%	percent in agreement	two-tailed confident interval for p=95%
1	A criminal can be punished more severely than the law requires, if this may serve as a deterrent for others. ___ Yes ___ No	11.1	± 6.5	76.1	± 8.03
2	A doctor should conceal from a patient that he has cancer, in order to diminish the patient's suffering. ___ Yes ___ No	1.14	± 4.1	74.5	± 8.18
3	A good person in a situation of conflict with an insolent person: ___ would not seek compromise with him ___ would seek compromise with him	24.1	± 9.05	73.6	± 8.27
4	Two terrorists are hijacking a small plane. There is a possibility of killing them without injury to the passengers. Another possibility is to start negotiations first and try to persuade them to surrender. The head of the rescue group made the decision not to negotiate with the criminals. Did he act correctly? ___ Yes ___ No	24.7	± 8.95	55.4	± 9.33

number of pair	number of statement	STATEMENTS	AMERICANS		SOVIETS	
			percent in agreement	two-tailed confidential interval for p=95%	percent in agreement	two-tailed confidential interval for p=95%
1	1	A doctor should conceal from a patient that he has cancer, in order to diminish his suffering.	8.0	± 6.8	89.0	± 6.7
	2	A doctor should not conceal from a patient that he has cancer, in order to diminish his suffering.	80.5	± 9.9	15.8	± 8.0
2	3	A malefactor can be punished more severely than the law requires, if this may serve as a deterrent for others.	11.5	± 8.0	84.5	± 7.8
	4	A malefactor cannot be punished more severely than the law requires, even if this may serve as a deterrent for others.	83.6	± 9.4	28.0	± 9.9
3	5	One may give false evidence in order to help an innocent person avoid jail.	19.9	± 8.4	65.0	± 10.0
	6	One must not give false evidence even in order to help an innocent person avoid jail.	82.25	± 9.6	42.5	± 10.7
4	7	One may send a cheat sheet during a competitive examination to a close friend.	8.0	± 6.8	62.0	± 10.1
	8	One must not send a cheat sheet during a competitive examination, even to a close friend.	90.3	± 7.4	37.5	± 10.3

Table 1

PHILOSOPHY		First ethical system		Second ethical system
		end does not justify means		end justifies means
ifical vidual	saint	non-aggressive: tends toward compromise with a partner; has low self-evaluation		aggressive: tends toward conflict with a partner; has low self-evaluation
	hero	non-aggressive: tends toward compromise with a partner; has high self-evaluation		aggressive: tends toward conflict with a partner; has high self-evaluation
-sacrificial vidual	philistine	aggressive: tends toward conflict with a partner; has low self-evaluation		non-aggressive: tends toward compromise with a partner; has low self-evaluation
	dissembler	aggressive: tends toward conflict with a partner; has high self-evaluation		non-aggressive: tends toward compromise with a partner; has high self-evaluation

I

II

saint

Pop John Paul II
SakharovLenin
Khomeini
Ho Chi Minh

hero

F.D. Roosevelt
KarterCastro, Tito, Caddafi
Stalin, Andropov
Hitler

philistine

Pinochet
FrancoSadat
Kosygin

dissembler

Shah of Iran
SomozaKhrushchev
Brezhnev

STAT



